

Cornette's team is one for the ages

Professional wrestling is a business built around muscleheads, giants, pretty boys and ferocious-looking beasts.

It's hardly a world in which one would expect to find an enduring and successful act comprised of an ex-photographer, an ex-lifeguard and a guy who used to haul the ring around.

But that's the background of manager Jim Cornette and his tag team of "Sweet" Stan Lane and "Beautiful" Bobby Eaton, the Midnight Express.

Cornette, 28, is the consensus choice for the best manager of this era and may be the best ever.

Before getting into wrestling, he was a photographer for wrestling magazines in the United States and Japan. As a teenager in Louisville he did the programs and ran the concession stand for the local regional promotion. He read the magazines, subscribed to the newsletters, watched videotapes from around the world and attended wrestling-fan conventions.

He broke into managing in Tennessee in 1982, and made a national reputation two years later in the old Mid-South promotion. With Cornette's mouth and the ability of the Express team, then composed of Eaton and Dennis Condrey, the trio were leading villains when the promotion, which ran shows in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas, broke one gate record after another.

This led to the National Wrestling Alliance signing the trio in the summer of 1985. With the exception of a short hiatus because of contract problems, they've been there ever since.

Their tenure in the NWA has brought Cornette the manager of the year award the last five years, best on interviews from 1985-88 and the Midnight Express was tag team of the year from 1986-88. The trio had an off year in 1989. There were contract problems with NWA management. The brass wanted to break up the trio, feeling the act had outlived its shelf life. But the group refused, quitting together once last year to show unity and threatening to do the same this year when management wanted to split the trio up again.

Management's loss at the contract table turned out to be its gain at the arenas. The Midnight Express, which holds the NWA's United States tag-team title, is the clear favorite to win tag team of the year honors.

A non-stop talker, Cornette is the perfect complement to Eaton, 31, who rarely speaks. The two have been together as manager and wrestler since 1983, longer than any active manager/wrestler.

Lane, 36, was a lifeguard in Myrtle Beach, S.C. and is the only wrestler originally trained by Ric Flair, whom he met at a beach party. A one-time martial-arts instructor, Lane joined Cornette and Eaton in 1987 when Eaton's original tag-team partner, Dennis Condrey, quit the NWA.



**GRUNT
AND
GRIN**

BY DAVE MELTZER
FOR THE NATIONAL

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